Editorial

Different worlds of indexing

The two awards made by the Wheatley Panel for 1989, reported later in this issue, indicate two economic extremes of indexing in the UK today.

The Medal was awarded to Richard Raper, Managing Editor of Indexing Specialists in Hove, Sussex. We have described this group practice for commissioned indexes before (in The Indexer of October 1989, page 226). It employs seventeen indexers, full or part-time, engaged for their subject specialisms and trained on the job, where all work on computers. Since 1988 they have indexed more than a hundred books annually, with an increase of over 100% turnover.

The winning, consolidated index is in volume 29 of a new complete edition of all the published books of Charles Darwin, from Pickering and Chatto. The set costs £1,495, and, one review claims, 'should be on the shelves of all libraries'. Sales figures for this commercial undertaking are likely to be enormous; and the contract for Indexing Specialists is likely to have been businesslike.

The other award made by the Wheatley Panel for 1989 was to Ann Hudson, Commended for the General index to Sussex Archaeological Collections, volumes 101-25, published by the Sussex Archaeological Society. The compilation of this index was fully described by the indexer in our October 1990 issue (pages 83-90). She worked alone at home, manually, filling over twenty-four shoeboxes with cards before typing the index onto a word-processor. She also spoke of the work to a meeting of the Society of Indexers on 22 February 1990, when questions afterwards elicited details of her engagement and payment for this index. She was required to give an advance estimate, which was accepted and adhered to; however, the amount of research and checking that proved necessary made the number of hours actually taken considerably exceed the estimate tendered; the total hours worked set against the fee received showed that she had compiled this very high-quality index for two thirds of the SI minimum recommended rate. The Sussex Archaeological Society's treasurer was present at the SI meeting and confirmed that had the full realistic fee been asked originally, the indexer would simply not have been engaged, and the index not compiled. Five hundred copies of the index were printed, costing a heavily subsidized £12.50 (pre-publication price £7.50 to members), and 'sales have been sluggish'.

These are indeed two different worlds of publishing—the commercial world, and that of the near-voluntary learned societies, where authors are unpaid, and editors receive at most honoraria only. It is gratifying to find the highest standards of indexing attained in both; but sad that financial rewards for the indexers should be so different.